o promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which nhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church;) provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization."*

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The Church Serves the Community

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This is a debatable subject. In any group of rural church leaders, you are likely to find a high percentage who will insist that the church is not just another community institution but that it is unique, of divine origin, and it must therefore be given special consideration. These people will insist that the community has an obligation to serve the church. We find different expressions of this viewpoint. There is the Sunday school teacher who complains because the parents do not cooperate with the church school. There are ministers who will get disgusted because the schools and other community organizations fail to recognize the uniqueness of the church and give it their cooperation. Again there is the preacher who will complain because leaders developed and trained by the church have been taken over by some community organization. In a recent meeting of over one hundred rural ministers, the majority of the group insisted that they did not have time to participate in community life to any large degree. They were busy with their special religious duties and had little time for community councils, P.T.A.'s, luncheon clubs, Red Cross, 4-H and other community activities. Therefore, it may be worthwhile considering carefully the question, "Should the Church Serve the Community?"

Should the Church Serve the Community?

In thinking through this question my mind went back to two books I had read in recent years. One of them entitled, Churches of Distinction in Town and Country, compiled by Dr. Brunner, tells the story of some fifteen unusually successful country churches. I remembered that each of these churches was distinctive because it served the paramount needs of its community. Then, there is the delightful little booklet, edited by Dr. Ralph Felton, entitled, One Foot on the Land, telling the story of sixteen outstanding rural churches in America and in mission lands. Even a casual reading of these stories emphasizes the service which the church renders its community. As I remembered the stories in these two books, I was forced to say, "Well, maybe there is something to this idea of the church serving the community."

As I continued my reflections, my mind went back to a letter which I

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*An address delivered before the Rural Pastors Conference, Mississippi State College, Starkville, Miss., August 2, 1949. Dr. Hanna is head of the Rural Church Department of Louisville Theological Seminary. We are indebted to him for this concise statement which comes from his long experience in field training.

received from my pastor at the time I made my decision to enter the ministry. This pastor was a deeply spiritual man. He gave his attention in a preeminent way to things sacred. Therefore, it was all the more challenging to read one sentence in his letter, "The longer I live the more I am convinced that there is no real distinction between the secular and the sacred. With a proper emphasis we can make anything sacred." In this connection I thought of Liberty Hyde Bailey's book, The Holy Earth, in which he makes man's relation to the land something of deep spiritual significance and so undergirds the idea that the church must be interested not only in the man but in the man and his land and the relations that exist between the two.

Then I began to think along another line. How many of the services now being performed by so-called secular agencies were once the primary concern of the church! How often we have been reminded that the original settlers of th thirteen colonies built first the home, then the church, and then the school. I the early days many of our pastors were also community schoolteachers. Most of our early colleges were established by the churches. Yes, education was considered a basic function for which the church was responsible. Through the years our communities have recognized education as an essential, and the community has taken over the responsibility for the school. As a church, should we lose interest because we have aroused the interest of others in a thing that is good?

As one looks back and studies the history of the idea of soil conservation, we are impressed with the fact that those who gave soil conservation its greatest impetus were deeply religious men who thought of their task as one that was more spiritual than material. Now the greater proportion of society has recognized a real concern for the conservation of the soil, and its program is underwritten by governmental and community agencies. It would be a tragic thing if the church should now allow society to think of soil conservation as a purely material good. The whole program must be undergirded with a sense of man's stewardship responsibility. Again, much of the ministry of Jesus was given to the healing of those afflicted with divers diseases. Through the years the church has fostered the study of medicine and the establishment of hospitals, until the whole of society has become aware of the need and necessity of adequate medical care. Certainly the church should not now withdraw its interest from a ministry for the healing of body and mind.

The early cooperatives, seeking to solve some of the economic ills of people, were born out of a concern on the part of the church and church people. More and more, the cooperatives are being taken over by society and its communit institutions, but the Christian motivation is still a primary essential if the cooperative movement is to continue to function effectively. Concern for the welfare of the poor and of children had its birth within the church. Gradually, because of the church's ministry to human need at all levels, society has been increasingly concerned about human welfare. Any one with experience in welfare work knows that without a Christian motivation it can become sterile. Yes, historically the church has always been concerned about serving the needs of the community, and if the church is to remain a vital institution, it must continue to serve.

The Program Committee of the American Country Life Association planned the 1946 meeting around four commissions: (1) Public Relations Problems of Agriculture, (2) Number of People on Farms, (3) Moral and Religious Values in Rural Life, and (4) The Rural Community and International Relations. Much to the surprise of the leaders about eighty per cent of the people present enrolled for th

commission on the study of Moral and Religious Values in Rural Life! As one of the leaders of that particular commission, I had thought it would be attended only by ministers and priests, but actually there were only two ministers and three priests; others were representatives of the P.T.A., the Farm Bureau, the Grange, the Farmers' Union, cooperatives, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, American Library Association, state educational systems, and other community groups. They seemed very definitely to feel that it was their business as members of community groups to be concerned about the religious and moral foundations of rural life. Some of them were even daring enough to say that they could deal with some religious problems more effectively than the rural church, since they made a united approach to the community while the church, with its denominationalism, made a divided approach. This group at least felt that the church would be advantaged by working in and through community organizations to build the religious and moral foundations of rural life.

As I continued to think on this idea of the church serving the community, it appeared to me as a fact that we rarely find a good church in a bad community. Harold Kaufman, in his study of "religious organization" in Kentucky, has shown quite clearly that in the communities where the standard of living is low the percentage of the people in the churches is also low; where the standard of living is high the percentage of people who are members of the church is also high. Thus, it would seem that as we improve the living standards of the people, the community and religious life will improve. If we are to have strong churches, we must have strong communities. He who would build his church must therefore build his community. A few years ago a story of two South Carolina communities threw interesting light on this idea. One community had fertile land which was absentee-owned. The community was made up of renters who had little interest in the community institutions. In the other community the land was much less fertile, but it was farmed by owner-operators. Here the community institutions were strong, especially the churches. It would follow from this story that there is a definite connection between the quality of the community and the quality of the church life.

Being a minister and believing that Jesus is the supreme authority, I had to view this question in the light of the practices and teachings of Jesus. I find that he said over and over again that if any would be great among you let him first become the servant of all. Therefore, it behooves the church to serve the community, if the church would be great. Again Jesus said that he that would save his life should lose it, and he that would lose his life for Christ's sake and the gospel would find it. From this it would seem that we have the highest authority for saying that the church must lose herself in serving the community of which she is a part and make the promise of Jesus that "he that will lose his life for my sake and the gospel will find it" the basis of our hope.

One illustration will drive home this point. No one would deny that the first obligation of the church is evangelism. A study has recently been made of an area in which most of the ministers have the point of view that it is not their responsibility to serve the community. It was discovered that it required about fifty members in the churches served by these ministers to bring one person to a confession of faith in Jesus Christ; while in another community, served by a minister with a stronger conviction that the church ought to serve the community, it required only twenty members to bring one to a confession of faith in Jesus Christ. How true it is that if we seek to save our life we lose it. Only as the church is willing to throw herself and all her resources behind every effort for community betterment can the church be saved. Should the church serve the

community? The answer on all counts is "yes"!

How Can the Church Serve the Community?

Strengthen Service Agencies

There are many services available to rural people through agricultural extension, governmental agencies, and farm organizations; but many rural communities are without some or, in extreme cases, all of these services simply because no one is concerned to bring these services to the community. The church that makes an effort to know of these services and brings them actively into the community will, in the end, be greatly blessed. Let me illustrate. During the war a new, thickly-settled rural community developed near a war plant. A nearby church became interested and established a mission. A small chapel was built for the use of the people. As soon as the building was completed, the minister made contact with every community agency in that area and asked them to come in and serve the people, using the chapel as a meeting place whenever needed. The county agent and the home demonstration agent were asked to come in and form a garden club, a home economics club, and a 4-H group. All of them met in the chapel. The home economics group serving the whole community has for years functioned as the Ladies Aid Society of the church, taking a great interest in the upkeep of the building. The 4-H group became the foundation for effective youth work. The Red Cross was invited to hold first aid and home nursing classes; the extension horticulturist of the state university was asked to help with landscaping the grounds. The Department of Public Welfare was contacted in all cases of human need, and they seemed very glad to work with the minister. The U.S.O. put on a movie each Tuesday night. Thus, the people began to think of the church as an organization which was concerned with their every need and became more and more attached to it. Later, the Men's Club of the church organized the community to get a water system and road signs.

Originally the community was known as Cartwright Heights, but gradually the people began to think of it as the Miller's Chapel Community, because the church had become the central institution. Some church people shy away from the use of other community agencies because they want the church to get the credit. But we can learn a lot from the statement by an unknown source, "There is no limit to the good that can be done if we are not concerned as to who gets the credit."

A Concern for Common Welfare

The church can serve the community by motivating a spirit of service. This can be done by bringing the people face to face with community need through discussion groups. It is not enough to tell people of the needs from the pulpit; they must be helped to discover those needs for themselves. Some years ago I personally made a community survey and then very carefully presented the discovered needs from the pulpit. The people did not become a bit excited. I quietly filed away my data and waited for a little while; then I organized the people to make their own survey and study the data collected. The effect was startling -- the same facts that had been presented from the pulpit now became vital to the people when they had discovered them for themselves, and they were rather easily helped to do something about these needs.

The church must make herself responsible for arousing a Christian concern for known needs. Dr. Elton Trueblood in his book, The Predicament of Mod

Man, says that most of the present-day problems stem from a lack of concern for general welfare. This truth is borne out by an article by Eric Johnson in the February 1949 Fortune, entitled "Europe's Lessons for Business Men." He says, "The European business man, by and large, does not feel a sense of responsibility to society as a whole; he is not socially minded." He goes on to say that Socialism has come to Europe and England largely because of this lack of concern. He warns the American business man that Socialism will come to the U.S.A. unless the business men of our country show an increasing concern for general welfare. Certainly Christian business men can show such a concern through their church.

Develop a Respect for Personality

Wonders can be accomplished in a community if the church can develop a proper respect for human personality. Recently a traveler asked a leader in India what was the greatest single contribution of the church to India. After some thought he replied that, if the church should withdraw from India today, the country would still be greatly blessed because the church had made indigenous in Indian life the principle of the worth of the individual. Apart from Christianity, there is a tendency just to see people as they are -- and to despise the lowly, the weak, and the incompetent. The true Christian not only sees every man as he is but also as he can become under the grace of God. Thus, because we see people as potentially sons and daughters of God we can, by his grace, enable them to attain this status.

When this spirit of service is engendered, leadership will develop at an amazing rate. We do not get people to become leaders by challenging them to become leaders but rather by getting them to engage in service to meet human need. We need to learn what Jesus meant when he said, "If any would be great among you, let him first become the servant of all." If we can develop groups that are on fire to serve, we will have more leaders than we know how to use. Leadership is an honor conferred by the Lord on those who enter heartily into service. I am thinking of a church served by two young men in immediate succession. The first man had unusual gifts and indomitable energy. He was determined to use his energy to build the church. Some progress was made, but the people lacked a sense of confidence and much of the load of leadership fell on the young minister. He was succeeded by a young man of lesser gifts as a preacher. But this second man had a great faith in people. He gathered his people together in groups and helped them to see the needs, and then he challenged them to do something about it. The effect of this approach was amazing -- the crowds picked up; people who had felt that they were incapable before became leaders. I asked some of the people how they accounted for the difference. This was the illuminating reply, "Well, Bob, when he wants something done, wants it done his way and he wants it done now. On the other hand, Bill helps us to see the need and then asks us what we want to do about it."

Encourage a Spirit of Cooperation

The church can serve the community by encouraging a spirit of cooperation. There is some justification for the accusation sometimes leveled at the church that the church is a divisive, special-interest group which destroys the unity of the rural community. Dr. Walter Burr of the Kansas State Agricultural College, in addressing the American Country Life Association some years ago, told the following story.

"I was pleading with a superintendent of church activities in a certain district to allow us at the Agricultural College to send letters, with his

approval, to the rural ministers under his direction to get them interested in the rural community movement. We proposed to organize community clubs on a local basis and farm bureaus on a county basis. He definitely opposed the movement. I asked him to state his real reasons. He was an honest man and did so. 'Is it not your purpose,' he asked, 'to get all the people to meet together in one place with an almost religious zeal for community welfare?' I replied that he had stated the purpose better than I could. 'Then,' said he, 'when they become accustomed to doing that and were enjoying it, don't you think they might say, "Now we are all working together, let us bring our preacher here and have just one church!"' I replied that certainly if they should do that it would be a most desirable result. 'No, no!' he exclaimed. 'Can't you see that one, who has responsibility for and authority in a church such as ours, never could encourage a movement that might lead to that conclusion? It would destroy all of our church organization -- all our denominational machinery.'" If there is to be the unity of community, then the church must set the example.

Motivate and Develop Leadership

It is difficult to find good Scout masters, farm bureau leaders, P.T.A officers, etc., in communities where the church is weak. The stronger the church the more available will be a high type of leadership for community organizations. If the head of the Red Cross in the community is not conducting the work of the organization in a Christian way, it becomes the responsibility of the church to reach this person for Christ so that the Red Cross will become an expression of real Christian concern for human need. If the Scout master is failing to develop his troop in real Christian character, it is much better for the church to seek to reach and transform him by the gospel than it is to see that he is put out of his office. If the civic organizations are supporting questionable types of amusement and recreation, then the minister and his church should plan in every possible way to reach the leadership of the civic organizations with the gospel of Christ. If politics in the community are corrupt, it is because the church has not brought to bear upon the lives of the leading politicians the Christian message. Sometimes the lack of leadership in the community arises out of the fact that the church, through its leadership, has failed to lay the problem upon the hearts of the people and asked them what they are going to do about it.

Christ's Own Example

Jesus in his earthly ministry was concerned about the needs of the people and was often criticized because of a failure to promote the ecclesiastical institutions of his day. His concern for the needs of people is well illustrated in the three accounts of the feeding of the 5,000. One of the writers says that Jesus lifted up his eyes and saw that the people were hungry, and he had compassion on them and fed them; the second writer says that he lifted up his eyes and saw that the people were scattered abroad as sheep without a shepherd, and he had compassion upon them and taught them; the third writer says that Jesus lifted up his eyes and saw that the people were sick with divers diseases, and he had compassion on them and healed them. The church is the body of the Lord Jesus Christ and represents him in the community. It is up to us in his name to lift up our eyes and see the needs and have compassion. If the church is to continue to be the body of Christ, it must serve the community. The church can find herself only by losing herself in service.

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